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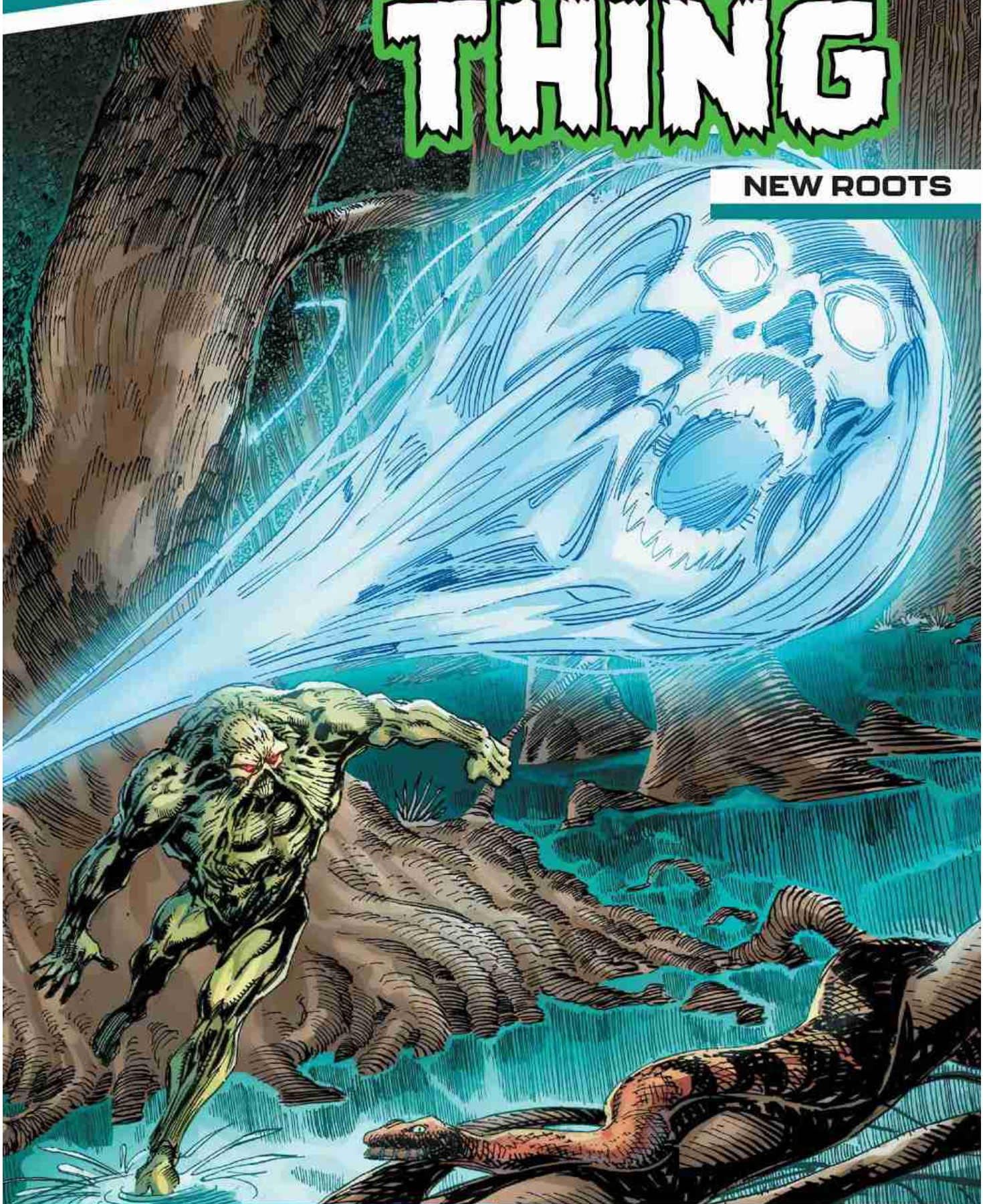
SWAMP THING

NEW ROOTS



TOYS ON PARADE

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THE GHOST LIGHT

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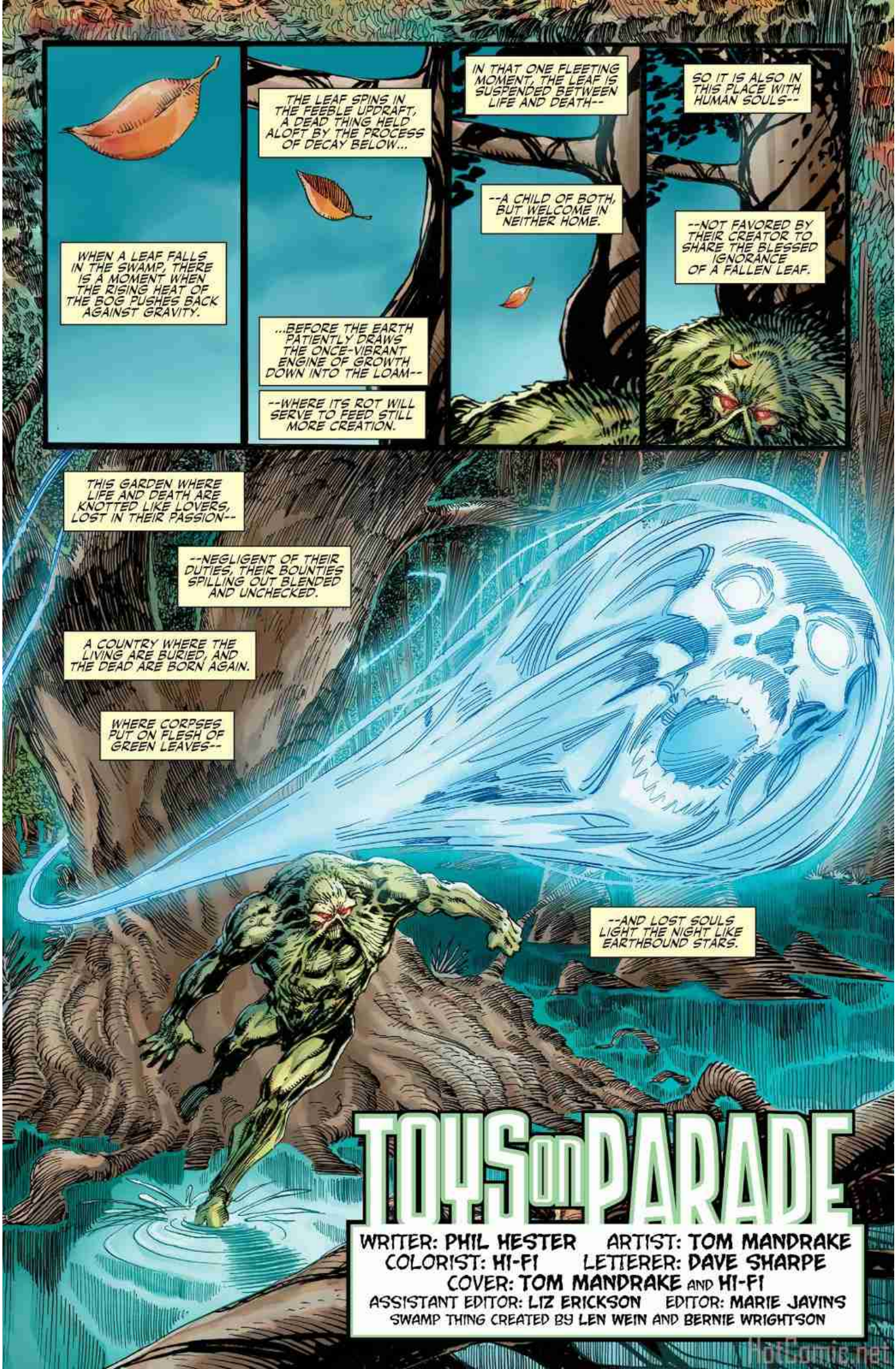
WHEN A LEAF FALLS IN THE SWAMP, THERE IS A MOMENT WHEN THE RISING HEAT OF THE BOG PUSHES BACK AGAINST GRAVITY.
THE LEAF SPINS IN THE FEEBLE UPDRAFT, A DEAD THING HELD ALOFT BY THE PROCESS OF DECAY BELOW...
...BEFORE THE EARTH PATIENTLY DRAWS THE ONCE-VIBRANT ENGINE OF GROWTH DOWN INTO THE LOAM--
--WHERE ITS ROT WILL SERVE TO FEED STILL MORE CREATION.
IN THAT ONE FLEETING MOMENT, THE LEAF IS SUSPENDED BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH--
--A CHILD OF BOTH, BUT WELCOME IN NEITHER HOME.
SO IT IS ALSO IN THIS PLACE WITH HUMAN SOULS--
--NOT FAVORED BY THEIR CREATOR TO SHARE THE BLESSED IGNORANCE OF A FALLEN LEAF.
THIS GARDEN WHERE LIFE AND DEATH ARE KNOTTED LIKE LOVERS, LOST IN THEIR PASSION--
--NEGLIGENT OF THEIR DUTIES, THEIR BOUNTIES SPILLING OUT BLENDED AND UNCHECKED.
A COUNTRY WHERE THE LIVING ARE BURIED, AND THE DEAD ARE BORN AGAIN.
WHERE CORPSES PUT ON FLESH OF GREEN LEAVES--
--AND LOST SOULS LIGHT THE NIGHT LIKE EARTHBOUND STARS.

TOYS on PARADE

WRITER: PHIL HESTER ARTIST: TOM MANDRAKE
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SWAMP THING CREATED BY LEN WEIN AND BERNIE WRIGHTSON

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THE LOCALS CALL IT THE FIFOLET, AND REGARD THE LEGENDARY GHOST LIGHT WITH BOTH REVERENCE AND FEAR.
FOR WEEKS, IT HAS BECKONED THE SWAMP THING TO CRISES WHERE HIS UNEARTHLY STRENGTH COULD RESCUE THE INNOCENT.
HIS CURIOSITY STOKED, HE HUNTED THE LIGHT AS IT BOBBED THROUGH SKELETAL TREES AND SKIPPED ALONG BLACK BAYOUS.
UNTIL THE SWAMP THING REALIZED HIS HUNT WAS MERELY ANOTHER DANCE MEANT TO BIND HIM TO THE FIFOLET'S WILL.
GARBAGE. YOU BROUGHT ME ALL THIS WAY...TO SHOW ME GARBAGE?
OUT OF THE WATER WITH YOU... BEFORE SOME POOR CREATURE...CHOKES ON YOU.
GOOD LORD!
BUT BY THE LOOKS OF IT...YOU'VE ALREADY SUFFERED MUCH WORSE THAN--
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HURRY UP, YOU SILLY THINGS! THERE'S NO TIME FOR A PARADE.
HOW DID YOU GET SO FAR FROM HOME?
THAT'S THE VOICE... OF A CHILD.
A CHILD OUT HERE...IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE.
LOOK HERE, FRIENDS. YOU KNOW WHAT TIME ANNA'S TEA PARTY IS.
WE NEED TO START RIGHT NOW. BEFORE DADDY'S TIME BEGINS.
IF PARTY TIME IS STILL GOING WHEN DADDY'S TIME BEGINS, HE'LL GET MAD.
AND WHEN HE GETS MAD THE BAD THINGS BEGIN.
ANNA
ANNA
NO. NOT A CHILD... IN BODY, AT LEAST.
BUT IN MIND.
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NO, GENERAL PENGUIN. YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED LAST TIME.
YOU'RE DOWN TO ONE FLIPPER ALREADY.
LISTEN TO ME, PRINCESS GIANT. HE'S STRONGER THAN ALL OF YOU, EVEN AS SICK AS HE IS.
YOU'RE ALL SO BRAVE, BUT THIS WILL ONLY MAKE IT WORSE!
HE'LL TEAR YOU ALL APART FOR GOOD THIS--
SKRUNCH!
PLEASE DON'T BE AFRAID.
I'VE COME... TO HELP YOU.
A MONSTER-MAN!

ANNA, I'VE KNOWN...MANY PEOPLE WITH POWERS LIKE YOURS.
THEY CAN BE... FRIGHTENING. YOU NEED TO BE TAKEN FROM HERE... PROTECTED UNTIL--
FRIGHTENING? OH, NO. I NEVER USE MY MAGIC EYES TO HURT ANYONE.
I CAN ONLY MOVE MY FRIENDS. BESIDES, THEY PROTECT ME. WELL, THEY TRY TO.
ANNA... I WOULD LIKE TO BE YOUR FRIEND.
OH.
YOU WOULD?
GIRL, YOU CALL THESE DAMN TOYS OFF OR ELSE!
I SWEAR, I GOT RID OF THESE THINGS ONCE AND--
WHAT THE HELL?

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ANNA, I'M SORRY... ABOUT YOUR FRIENDS. ABOUT YOUR HOME... ABOUT EVERY-THING.
DON'T BE SILLY. MY *FRIENDS* ARE STILL OKAY, AREN'T THEY?
YES. I SUPPOSE THEY ARE.
DON'T...LOOK BACK, ANNA. IT'S BETTER...TO NEVER LOOK BACK.
JUST LOOK...UP AT THE STARS.
OH, *LOOK THERE,* MONSTER-MAN!
A SHOOTING STAR! A *BLUE* ONE!
BUT SHOOTING STARS DON'T GO *UP.* I SAW THAT IN MY BOOK.
THEY FALL *DOWN,* DON'T THEY?
NOT ALWAYS, ANNA.
NOT AROUND HERE, ANYWAY.
END

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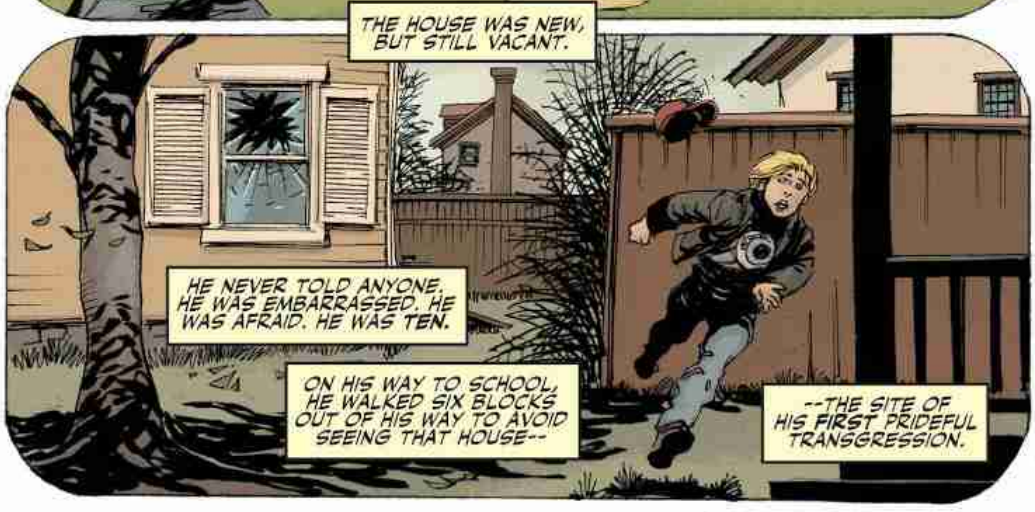
THERE IS A PERFECT DARKNESS IN THE SWAMP TONIGHT.
SOMETHING ALMOST LIKE A MAN SLOSHES TO A HALT IN THE MIRE.
ITS KNOTTED FINGERS TRACE THE STILL SURFACE OF THE WATER.

HE KNOWS EVERY SUNKEN CYPRESS AND BLADE OF SAW GRASS IN THIS SWAMP AS IF THEY WERE HIS OWN BONES.
BUT HIS SEARCH FOR A MYSTERIOUS GHOST LIGHT KNOWN AS THE FIFOLET HAS BROUGHT HIM TO A BOG HE SOMEHOW DOES NOT RECOGNIZE.

THE STILLNESS TEASES A MEMORY FROM ANOTHER LIFETIME TO THE SURFACE OF THE SWAMP THING'S MIND.
ALEC HOLLAND'S TENTH BIRTHDAY.
A TOY AIRPLANE POWERED BY COMPRESSED AIR.

HIS FATHER LECTURED HIM ABOUT CARING FOR SUCH AN EXPENSIVE GIFT.
HE WAS WARNED TO FLY IT ONLY IN THE YARD, WHEN THE WIND WAS LOW.
BUT HE WAS TEN.


THE HOUSE WAS NEW, BUT STILL VACANT.
HE NEVER TOLD ANYONE. HE WAS EMBARRASSED. HE WAS AFRAID. HE WAS TEN.
ON HIS WAY TO SCHOOL, HE WALKED SIX BLOCKS OUT OF HIS WAY TO AVOID SEEING THAT HOUSE--
--THE SITE OF HIS FIRST PRIDEFUL TRANSGRESSION.

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BUT NOT HIS LAST.
THOUGH HE ISN'T THAT BOY ANY LONGER, OR EVEN THE MAN HE GREW TO BECOME--
--THE ECHO OF THAT SMALL BOY'S SHAME REMINDS HIM WHERE HE IS AT LAST.
HE STANDS IN THE REMAINS OF THE LAB WHERE ALEC HOLLAND'S HUBRIS BROUGHT ABOUT HIS DEATH--
--AND THE SWAMP THING'S BIRTH.
THE FIFOLET WAS NEVER HIDING FROM THE SWAMP THING.
YOU AGAIN.
IT WAS WAITING FOR HIM TO COME HOME.
ENOUGH OF YOUR GAMES. WHY DID YOU BRING ME HERE?
YOU'RE GOING TO SPEAK TO ME...EVEN IF I HAVE TO GROW YOU A VOICE TO DO IT WITH.
SPLUT!
THE SWAMP THING CALLS A BODY FROM THE ROOTS BELOW, GROWING LIMBS, LUNGS, EYES, AS HE'S DONE COUNTLESS TIMES.
SPLOORTCH! SHLUKK! SHRIBB!
BUT INSTEAD OF INHABITING THIS NEW FORM, HE LEAVES IT EMPTY FOR THE BODILESS GHOST BEFORE HIM.
GO ON. TAKE IT.

PEOPLE HERE...CALL YOU THE FIFOLET.
THE GHOST LIGHT...A SOUL TIED TO THE PLACE OF ITS DEATH.
THEY SAY THAT IT BRINGS...AID TO THE INNOCENT... AND WOE TO THE WICKED.
THIS--
THIS IS WEIRD.
THAT'S NO LIE.
MANY YEARS AGO, OR MAYBE JUST A FEW--I CAN'T TELL ANYMORE-- I WAS A VERY BAD MAN.
I THREATENED PEOPLE FOR MONEY, DESTROYED THEIR WORK, BURNED THEIR HOMES.
I WAS SENT HERE TO THREATEN A SCIENTIST NAMED HOLLAND. DIDN'T TAKE. GUY WAS AS STUBBORN AS HE WAS SMART, I GUESS.
SO I PLANTED A BOMB IN HIS LABORATORY. HE DIED THERE.
WELL, HERE, ACTUALLY.
BUT THIS IS THE PLACE OF HIS DEATH, NOT YOURS.
WHAT BINDS YOU HERE?
OH, BUT IT IS THE PLACE OF MY DEATH.

THE GHOST LIGHT

WRITER: PHIL HESTER ARTIST: TOM MANDRAKE COLORIST: HI-FI
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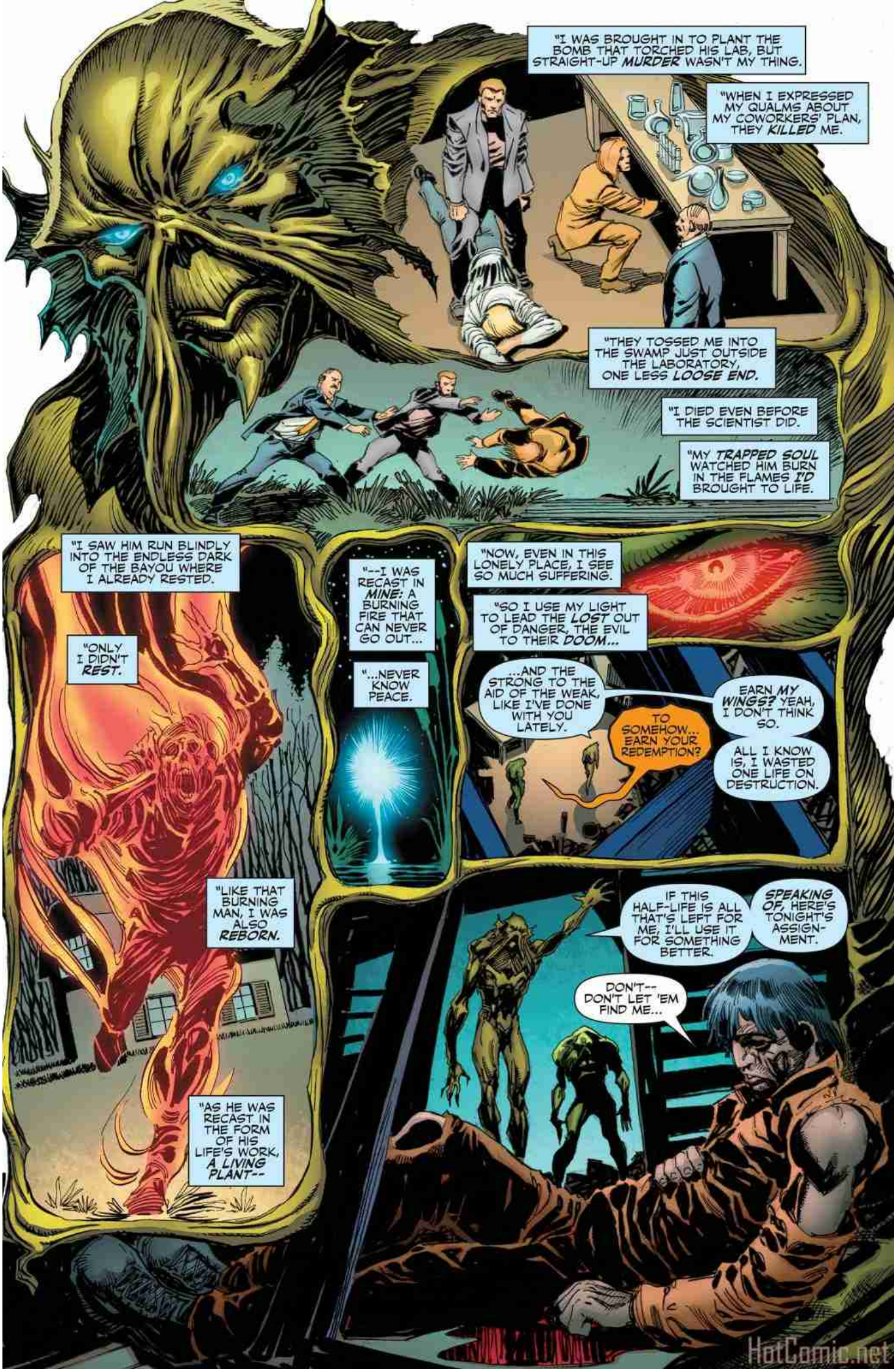
"I WAS BROUGHT IN TO PLANT THE BOMB THAT TORCHED HIS LAB, BUT STRAIGHT-UP *MURDER* WASN'T MY THING.
"WHEN I EXPRESSED MY QUALMS ABOUT MY COWORKERS' PLAN, THEY *KILLED* ME.
"THEY TOSSED ME INTO THE SWAMP JUST OUTSIDE THE LABORATORY, ONE LESS *LOOSE END.*
"I DIED EVEN BEFORE THE SCIENTIST DID.
"MY *TRAPPED SOUL* WATCHED HIM BURN IN THE FLAMES *I'D* BROUGHT TO LIFE.
"I SAW HIM RUN BLINDLY INTO THE ENDLESS DARK OF THE BAYOU WHERE I ALREADY RESTED.
"ONLY I DIDN'T *REST.*
"--I WAS RECAST IN *MINE:* A BURNING FIRE THAT CAN NEVER GO OUT...
"...NEVER KNOW PEACE.
"NOW, EVEN IN THIS LONELY PLACE, I SEE SO MUCH SUFFERING.
"SO I USE MY LIGHT TO LEAD THE *LOST* OUT OF DANGER, THE EVIL TO THEIR *DOOM...*
...AND THE STRONG TO THE AID OF THE WEAK, LIKE I'VE DONE WITH YOU LATELY.
TO SOMEHOW... EARN YOUR REDEMPTION?
EARN *MY WINGS?* YEAH, I DON'T THINK SO.
ALL I KNOW IS, I WASTED ONE LIFE ON DESTRUCTION.
"LIKE THAT BURNING MAN, I WAS ALSO *REBORN.*
IF THIS HALF-LIFE IS ALL THAT'S LEFT FOR ME, I'LL USE IT FOR SOMETHING BETTER.
SPEAKING OF, HERE'S TONIGHT'S ASSIGN-MENT.
DON'T-- DON'T LET 'EM FIND ME...
"AS HE WAS RECAST IN THE FORM OF HIS LIFE'S WORK, *A LIVING PLANT--*
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...THE FIFOLET WAS LEADING ME HOME... ONE LAST TIME.
WHAT CRUEL GAME ARE YOU PLAYING WITH THIS MAN?
HE'S BEEN SHOT. HIS DEATH IS NEAR.
NOT... YET.
NOT UNTIL I GET HOME... ONE LAST TIME.
MAYBE YOU COULD DO YOUR THING, YOU KNOW? LIKE YOU DID WITH ME.
BE STILL. I WON'T HURT YOU.
THE SWAMP THING'S FINGERS GROW THIN AND DELICATE, TAKE ROOT IN THE GAPING WOUNDS IN THE OLD MAN'S BODY.
THE FILAMENTS SNAKE THROUGH THE RUINED FLESH, FIND THE FLORA ALREADY LIVING THERE--
--AND SEND THEM A COMMAND TO BLOOM IN THE RED DARKNESS--
--TO BRING NEW LIFE.
I GREW PLANT TISSUE TO BIND YOUR WOUNDS... INSIDE AND OUT.
SPROUTED NEW ORGANS... TO REPLACE THE OLD.
BUT I'M AFRAID IT WON'T LAST LONG.
BY GOD, YOU AIN'T NO DEVIL AT ALL. YOU'RE THE MAN-OF-THE-WOODS HIMSELF.
WHERE IS HOME FOR YOU, OLD MAN?
NEAR ENOUGH, IF THEM BLOODHOUNDS DON'T FIND ME FIRST.
LITTLE HOUMA TRIBE VILLAGE SOUTH SIDE OF LAKE HATCH. LEAST I THINK.
HAVEN'T SEEN IT FOR FORTY YEARS NOW.

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YOU KNOW SOMETHING FUNNY? THEY WAS ABOUT TO LET ME GO.
JUST A FEW MORE MONTHS. THEY FIGURE I'M A OLD MAN. WHO CAN I HURT NOW?
BUT ON THE BUS TO GET MY DIALYSIS, I SAW THE SUN SKIPPING OVER THEM CYPRESS.
I--I JUST CAN'T DIE ON A CONCRETE FLOOR. I CAN'T DIE UNDER THEM BUZZING LIGHTS.
SOUNDS LIKE NONSENSE WHEN I SAY IT.
LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF A STORY.
LIKE YOU, MAN-OF-THE-WOODS. YOU COME OUT OF A STORY LIKE A GIANT, LIKE A DRAGON.
YOU COME TO SEE ME OUT OF THIS WORLD AND INTO YOURS, DIDN'T YOU?
AS GOOD AN EXPLANATION AS ANY.
AARROOOO!
THE DOGS--THEY GOT MY SCENT.
TOO LATE NOW. NEVER GET HOME.
WAIT, WAIT. LET ME HANDLE THIS ONE.
BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I STRETCHED MY LEGS.
ROWF!
ROWF!
ROWF!
ROWF!
ROW--
BOO!
WHEEN! WHEEN!
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THIS IS IT. JUST PAST THEM BLACK TUPELO TREES.
PUT ME DOWN. LET ME WALK ON MY PEOPLE'S LAND.
I'M SORRY. IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S BEEN DESERTED... FOR MANY YEARS NOW.
THE LAND CAN'T SUPPORT THE PEOPLE IT ONCE DID.
RUN AWAY FOR NOTHING. SHOT FOR NOTHING.
THAT'S A FIT ENDING TO A MAN'S STORY, AIN'T IT?
BETTER THAN THE ENDING I GAVE THE OTHER FELLA FORTY YEARS BACK.
ONE MORE FAVOR, MAN-OF-THE-WOODS. DON'T DESERVE IT, BUT WHO DESERVES ANYTHING THEY GOT?
LET ME SLEEP HERE UNDER YOUR TREES.
DON'T LET THEM BURY ME WHERE IT DON'T EVER GET DARK.
LET ME SLEEP...
SPLUTCH! SHRIPP! SHLUKK!
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WHATEVER HE'S DONE IN LIFE... HE DESERVES REST IN DEATH.
AS DO YOU.
SHROOOOM!
I'M NOT THE MAN YOU KILLED, NOT ANYMORE. BUT I HOLD HIS MEMORIES, HIS PASSIONS.
I'M AS CLOSE AS YOU WILL GET TO ALEC HOLLAND IN THIS WORLD.
IT IS NOT MY PLACE TO FORGIVE YOU... BUT IF IT WERE...
I WÖULD.
DID YOU HEAR ME? I SAID--
BUT THE BLUE LIGHT HAD GONE OUT OF HIS COMPANION'S EYES.
--FIXED AND AT REST.
THE CLOUDS BROKE OVER THE BAYOU WHERE THE THREE DEAD MEN LINGERED.
AND AS ONE FINALLY WALKED AWAY, HE SAW THAT FAMILIAR BLUE NOW GLITTERING IN THE NIGHT ABOVE--
--A DISTANT, CONSTANT STAR--
END

SON OF ULTRON